An Exploration of the Relationship between Poverty and Service Provision

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Abstract

The research project attempted to show how poverty levels affect the number of request cases the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) (Commonwealth of Kentucky, 2005) has open in the Green River Services Region (GRSR) (Commonwealth of Kentucky, 2005). Administrators questioned why GRSR (Commonwealth of Kentucky, 2005) has a large number of request cases when compared to other regions similar in county and geographic size. Request cases involve different types of services that are provided to individuals or families once a case is open. The number of existing request cases was compared to poverty level percentage, population, and median household income for each county. The outcome of the research showed that the poverty level does not have a positive relationship with the number of request cases. The findings will assist administrators in broadening their understanding of why this region has more request cases in comparison to other regions.

Introduction/Literature Review

The CHFS GRSR (Commonwealth of Kentucky, 2005) has seven counties that provide protection and permanency services. The counties are Daviess, Hancock, Henderson, Mclean, Ohio, Union, and Webster. The counties range in number of ongoing social service workers from 2 to 27 (TWS-M004S, 2006). The type of service provided includes child protection, domestic violence, adult protection, status, and family in needs of services. The number of cases a worker has on their case load range from 11 to 35 (TWS-M004S, 2006). However, the Council on Accreditation states that each worker should have no more than 17 cases assigned to them (Commonwealth of Kentucky, 2005).

Several administrators and staff have pondered as to why GRSR (Commonwealth of Kentucky, 2005) has a large number of ongoing request cases when compared to other regions. Speculation has been that some are opened that could have been resolved during the investigation phase. Others have complained that the case closure process too tedious. Other areas of concern surround services not being accessible, reliable, or provided in a timely manner. More cases may be moved to ongoing status in the counties where workers are split into specialized teams. Factors within the community or family may contribute to the need for ongoing services.

One factor to consider, when pondering why GRSR (Commonwealth of Kentucky, 2005) may have more cases in comparison to other regions, is four of the seven counties border another state. These counties receive a large number of transient clients who move back and forth between Kentucky and Indiana. Poverty is a factor that can lead to a high transient rate (Williams, 2006) as clients will move to another location for better job opportunities or to be near support systems such as family or friends.

Protection agencies must deal with investigating allegations of abuse, identify if the victim is at risk or was harmed, and ensure that appropriate services are provided (Krane & Davies, 2000; Gray, 2002). The services should address high risk behaviors of the alleged perpetrator to prevent further abuse or neglect. During the assessment phase, all contributing factors should be considered such as age of parent's, number of children, and if the family suffers from problems related to poverty. Krane and Davies (2000) found that other factors during provision of services may be contributing factors to the abuse or neglect. This can include poverty, stress, and illness (Krane & Davies, 2000; Daro, 2003). Social service workers and administration staff must deal with critical decisions regarding service priorities, delivery of service, and how to improve service provision (Krane & Davies, 2000). Service provision should focus on all factors related to the disruption such as poverty or psychosocial problems (Culhane, Webb, Grim, Metraux, & Culhane, 2003).

The community should become more involved in the prevention of abuse and neglect and factors that are associated with it, such as poverty. Some individuals see poverty as a necessary aspect for lower class individuals to cope with. The welfare recipient is seen as nonproductive or a bad parent (McCormack, 2005). The community agencies that attempt to provide solutions to poverty should work together (Payne & DeVol, 2005). This is not common as turf wars can cause agency staff to become territorial regarding the clients they serve.

The overall goal should be to develop solutions that are community specific. Communities are not similar in relation to their need or what solutions should be created. The solutions should be considered for all populations and not only in relation to children (Child Welfare League of America, n.d.), which appears to get majority of the focus. This can be related to media coverage, funding, and community awareness.

For the purpose of this study, poverty is defined by using a money income threshold determined by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) (U.S. Census, n.d.). The threshold varies by family size and composition (U.S. Census, n.d.). A family with two children may have a higher threshold to meet than a family with eight children (U.S. Census, n.d.). The household income is counted for all related household members (U.S. Census, n.d.). Poverty rate is the percentage of individuals or families who are below poverty (U.S. Census, n.d.).

This study defined median household income as the amount that divides the income distribution in half (U.S. Census, n.d.). Half of the income is above the median and half is below (U.S. Census, n.d.). This includes the income for all households, families, and unrelated individuals (U.S. Census, n.d.) residing in the counties being studied.

Generational poverty should be a consideration as the environment a person is exposed to creates a pattern to how an individual will react and problem solve in the future (Payne, 2005; Fording, Schram, & Soss, 2006). The southern United States has a history of poverty rates above the national average (Ziliak, 2003). The CFHS (Commonwealth of Kentucky, 2005) relates service provision or success thereof to previous generations they have worked with. The family history should be considered but not a determination of what will or will not work for the family now. Individuals can change and can be empowered to stop the cycle of generational poverty (Payne, 2005). According to a study completed by Devol (2005), people who are in poverty are problem solvers and should be asked to participate when solutions are being developed.

Population/Hypothesis

The hypothesis (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p. 33) is the “number of request cases the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) (Commonwealth of Kentucky, 2005) has for each county within the Green River Services Region (GRSR) (Commonwealth of Kentucky,

2005) will be positively correlated to the poverty level percentage within these specific counties." The independent variable (Marlow, 2005, p. 60) is poverty level percentage and the dependent variable (Marlow, 2005, p. 60) is number of request cases.

The population to be sampled was everyone residing within the seven counties of the GRSR (Commonwealth of Kentucky, 2005). The sampling frame consisted of everyone counted by the Kentucky Census (Workforce Kentucky, n.d.). It also incorporated those who had an active ongoing request case with CHFS (Commonwealth of Kentucky, 2005) in GRSR (Commonwealth of Kentucky, 2005) on March 5, 2006.

Methods

The research design used in this explanatory study (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p. 33) was secondary data analysis (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p. 182). The primary focus of this study was to compare the number of request cases per county to the poverty percentage level of that county. The GRSR (Commonwealth of Kentucky, 2005) has seven counties, which include Daviess, Hancock, Henderson, Mclean, Ohio, Union, and Webster. The number of request cases for each county was compared to those counties variables: poverty level percentage, median household income, and population.

The number of request cases was provided by CHFS (Commonwealth of Kentucky, 2005) on the Case Listing Regional Summary Report (TWS-M004S, 2006). The number of cases each worker had was totaled to provide the number of request cases that county had on March 5, 2006. Poverty level percentage and median household income was retrieved from the United States Census Bureau (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). The percentage of poverty from 2003 was obtained for each county. The estimated median household income, in dollars, for 2003 was also obtained for each county.

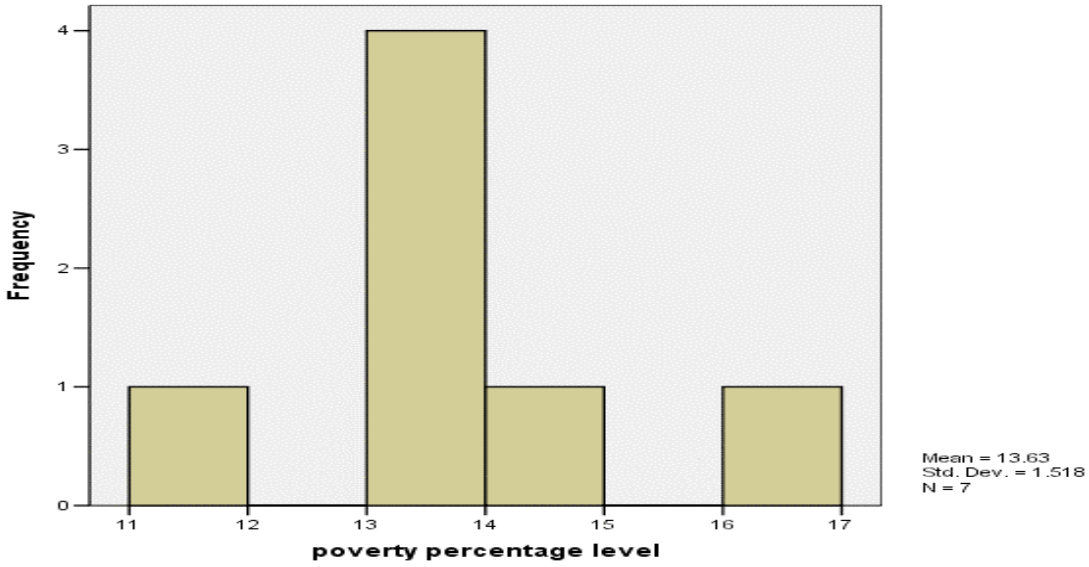
After data collection was completed, the results were entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (Babbie & Halley, 1994). Correlations (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p.250) for each variable (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p. 58) were run. The frequencies (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p. 239) that were run on each variable (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p. 58) were mean, median, mode, standard deviation, variance, range, minimum, and maximum (Marlow & Boone, 2005, pp. 238-247). Descriptive statistics (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p. 238) showed the range, minimum, maximum, mean, standard deviation, and variance (Marlow & Boone, 2005, pp. 238-247) for each variable (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p. 58). A bar graph (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p.275) was completed on the number of request cases and poverty percentage levels. These will be interpreted in the results section.

Results

The number of request cases for GRSR (Commonwealth of Kentucky, 2005) totaled 773 on March 5, 2006. The cases per county ranged from 483 to 20. The population ranged from 92,471 to 8,445. The largest county related to population is Daviess with the smallest being Hancock. The poverty percentage levels ranged from 11.1% to 16.2%. Hancock had the lowest with Ohio having the highest. The median household income ranged from $41,501 to $31,684. Hancock had the highest with Mclean having the lowest.

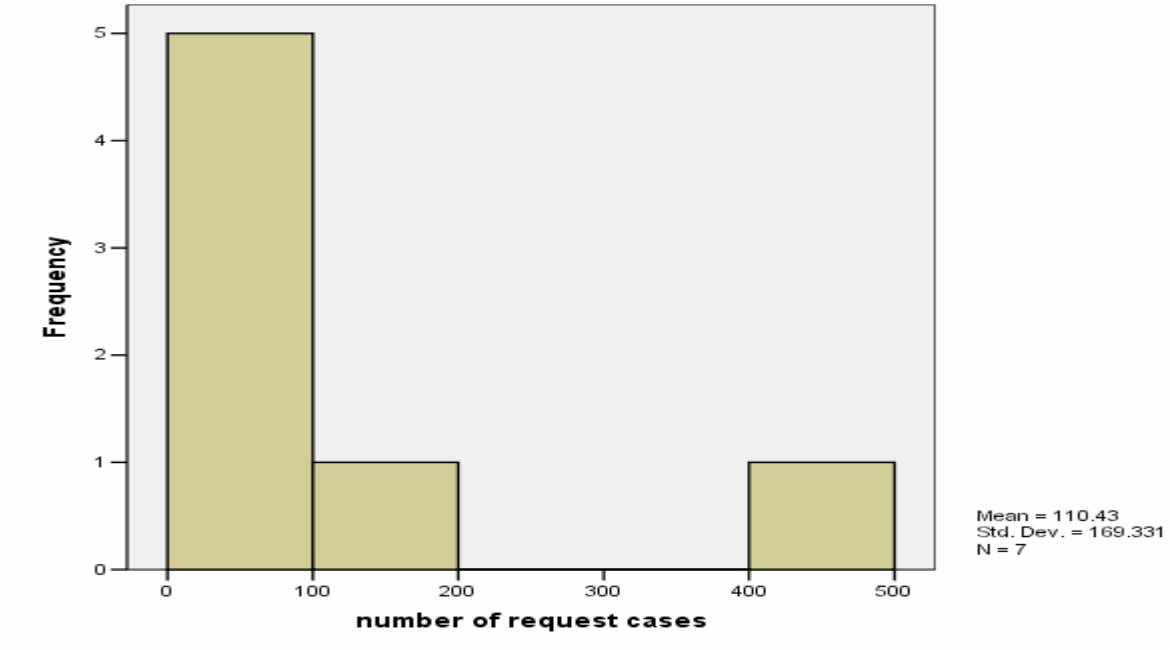
The frequency (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p. 239) (as represented by the y-axis) of poverty percentage levels (as represented by the x-axis) for each county (N=7) is shown in *Graph One*. There was one county ranging from 11-12%, four counties ranging from 13-14%, one county ranging from 14-15%, and one county ranging from 16-17%. The mean (Marlow & Boone, 2005, pp. 238-247) was 13.63 with standard deviation (Marlow & Boone, 2005, pp. 238-247) being 1.518.

Graph One: Poverty Percentage Level



Graph Two shows frequency (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p. 239) (as represented by y-axis) regarding the number of request cases (N=7) (as represented by the x-axis). There were five ranging from 0-100, one between 100 and 200, and one between 400 and 500. The mean (Marlow & Boone, 2005, pp. 238-247) was 110.43 and with standard deviation (Marlow & Boone, 2005, pp. 238-247) being 169.331.

Graph Two: Number of Request Cases



Descriptive statistics (*Table One)* and frequencies (*Table Two)* were run on each county (N=7) in which the mean (Marlow & Boone, 2005, pp. 238-247) and range (Marlow & Boone, 2005, pp. 238-247) will be discussed. The mean (Marlow & Boone, 2005, pp. 238-247) for poverty percentage level was 13.63, for population 29,873.86, for median household income $36,046.86, and number of request cases 110.43. The range (Marlow & Boone, 2005, pp. 238-247) for each was as follows: poverty percentage level was 5, population was 84,026, median household income was 9,817, and number of request cases was 463.

Table One: Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics							
	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
poverty percentage level	7	5.1	11.1	16.2	13.62857	1.518457864	2.305714
population of each county	7	84026	8445	92471	29873.86	30292.35932	9.18E+08
median household income	7	9817	31684	41501	36046.86	3685.959641	13586298
number of request cases	7	463	20	483	110.4286	169.3308961	28672.95
Valid N (listwise)	7						

Table Two: Frequencies

Frequencies					
Statistics					
		poverty percentage level	population of each county	median household income	number of request cases
N	Valid	7	7	7	7
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		13.62857143	29873.85714	36046.85714	110.4285714
Median		13.8	15684	35732	32
Mode		11.1	8445	31684	20
Std. Deviation		1.518457864	30292.35932	3685.959641	169.3308961
Variance		2.305714286	917627033.1	13586298.48	28672.95238
Range		5.1	84026	9817	463
Minimum		11.1	8445	31684	20
Maximum		16.2	92471	41501	483

In looking at ***Table Three,*** the correlations (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p.250) were run for all four variables (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p. 58). The Pearson Correlation (Royse, Thyer,

Padgett, & Logan, 2006, p. 349) was -.838, which indicated a significant negative relationship (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p. 254) between poverty percentage level and median household income. There was no significant relationship (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p. 254) found between the poverty percentage level and the number of request cases as the Pearson Correlation (Royse, Thyer, Padgett, & Logan, 2006, p. 349) was -.178. There was a significant positive relationship (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p. 254) found between population of each county and number of request cases as the Pearson Correlation (Royse, Thyer, Padgett, & Logan, 2006, p. 349) was .981.

Table Three: Correlations

Correlations					
		PPL	PC	MHI	NRC
poverty percentage level (PPL)	Pearson Correlation	1	-.08	-.838*	-.178
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.865	.019	.703
	N	7	7	7	7
population of each county (PC)	Pearson Correlation	-.080	1	.374	.981**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.865		.408	.000
	N	7	7	7	7
median household income (MHI)	Pearson Correlation	-.838*	.374	1	.418
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.019	.408		.351
	N	7	7	7	7
number of request cases (NRC)	Pearson Correlation	-.178	.981**	.418	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.703	.000	.351	
	N	7	7	7	7
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).					
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					

Discussion

The data analyzed did not prove the hypothesis (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p. 33) in question, “number of request cases the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS)

(Commonwealth of Kentucky, 2005) has for each county within the Green River Services Region (GRSR) (Commonwealth of Kentucky, 2005) will be positively correlated (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p. 250) to the poverty level percentage within these specific counties." Thus, the null hypothesis (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p. 253) was accepted. The poverty percentage level did not have a significant positive relationship (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p. 254) with the number of request cases for each county. According to the study, the number of request cases is not affected by poverty level.

It must be noted that two significant correlations (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p. 250) were discovered. A positive correlation (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p. 250) found that as population increases so does the poverty level. A negative correlation (Marlow & Boone, 2005, p. 250) found that as median household income decreases the poverty level increases. Thus it can be concluded from this study poverty level can be influenced by county population and income.

Previous research had concluded that environmental factors such as poverty can affect abuse and neglect (Krane & Davies, 2000; Daro, 2003). Factors related to poverty should be considered when assessing individuals and families risk for future abuse or neglect. This study has shown that the number of specific request cases is not significantly affected by the poverty level for each county with the GRSR (Commonwealth of Kentucky, 2006).

Limitations

One limitation to this study was data collected was not consistently collected from one year. The number of request cases came from 2006, population came from 2004, and the poverty percentage level and median household income came from 2003. The data entered for the course of three years could have had an impact on the outcome of this study. Future studies should look at data from the same year if possible.

Another limitation is related to the poverty level. The poverty levels used for this study were obtained from the U.S. Census in 2003. It is difficult to ensure that all those meeting the definition of poverty are counted accurately. Those residing in institutional settings, dormitories, military, and individuals under age 15 are not counted when poverty percentages are determined (U.S. Census, n.d.).

The last limitation found was in connection to the timeframe cases were looked at. For the purpose of this study, one month was looked at for the number of request cases. Future studies could look at number of request cases over a 12 month period. This may give more accurate results as it would provide a larger number of cases within the sample.

Conclusion

This study did not prove the tested hypothesis. There was no significant relationship found between poverty percentage level and number of request cases for the counties studied. The study did find significant positive and negative correlations. This was related to population within each county and median household income. More study is warranted in this subject area as improvements in the data collection could be made.

The study could be improved upon by looking at a number of request cases over a period of time. The number of request cases could be studied for a 12 month period to increase the size of the sample. The data should also be collected for all variables within the same year. This may not be feasible as data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau occurs every ten years. Future research could look at using specific state and county data for population, poverty percentage, and median household income.

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